

**Adolescent Crimes: Tracing the Scars, Influences, Circumstances and
Transformation in the Select Novels of Todd Strasser**

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Chapter VI

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Summation

In recent times there are many burning sociological issues that affect the wellbeing of people every day. One of the most important issues would be crime, which has been a part of society. Crime plays a significant role in literature and it is widespread in every part of world's literature. Starting from *Beowulf*, most literary works, especially fiction, have at least one element of crime present in it. Even though readers fail to see it at first glance it is a part of literature from the beginning. Through ages crime has been an underlying theme of many renowned literary works. Even Shakespeare's famous works such as *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* are fine examples of crime's existence in early literature. Crime fiction has always unfolded the darkest part of human mind. Most of these crimes depend on a person's psychological or sociological situations, which motivates him or her to commit an act of crime at some point of his or her life. Not everyone who runs through a tough situation becomes a criminal, but some do.

This chapter summarizes all the previous chapters. The research is an attempt to understand the author's select works and its outreach to common societal problems. The social relevance of the problem and solutions are discussed. The author's narrative style and themes are elaborated. Further the chapter suggests directions for future research and implication for practice.

This research addressed the socio-psychological reasons for the disruptive criminal behaviour in adolescents and the methods used to overcome their flaws in Todd Strasser's select novels. Based on the developmental stages of risk and protective factors the

motives for criminal and non-criminal behaviours in adolescents are identified. These stages were analysed under two conceptual frameworks: Adverse Childhood Experience and Enlightened Witness; and two theoretical frameworks: Differential Association theory and Situational Action theory respectively. Through these the malevolent factors which scarred, influenced and broke the moral constraint of the adolescents are traced.

The objectives of the research is: to trace the adverse conditions undergone by adolescents in their early childhood; to identify the delinquent factors which influence the adolescents towards crime; to recognise the circumstantial factors which lead adolescents to commit a crime; and to explore the transformation of adolescent criminals through protective factors in Todd Strasser's select novels.

The developmental approach examines the changes and influential patterns of criminal offenders. In this research, developmental approach is used to analyse the risk and protective factors in an adolescent's life which could provoke or terminate criminal behaviour. The approach began by examining the pathway, transition and turning point of a criminal behaviour process. The pathway to criminal behaviour is traced in chapter II; The beginning of the transition process which occurs due to delinquent peers is discussed in chapter III; The transition process reaches the final stage when the characters choose crime as their course of action in chapter III; Finally the turning point occurs due to the protective factors present in their life in chapter IV.

In recent times adolescents face many psychological and sociological issues which misdirect many adolescents into criminal paths. The major reasons behind such misdirection are: yearning for parental love, bullying, homelessness, poverty and craving for popularity. Children gravitate towards their parents or caregivers for love and care. When this

yearning for parental love is declined, there is a high chance that the child finds comfort in drugs. This is seen in the novel *Angel Dust Blues*. Bullying is another form of mental and physical abuse prevalent in many school environments. Bullying has led to many school shooting incidents across America. Similarly in the novel *Give a Boy a Gun* the victims of bullying are involved in school shootings. In recent years many adolescents are victims of homeless conditions because of improper parental care. These adolescents are at a high risk of finding comforts in alcohol. In the novel *Can't Get There from Here*, the characters experience living on streets and they become alcoholic as an underage. Poverty is one of the main reasons for an adolescent to choose crime. In the novel *If I Grow Up*, the character's poverty led to gang life as a gang leader. In recent times, one of the most taunting factors among adolescents are the crave for popularity and it is commonly witnessed among the age group twelve to twenty five. This powerful desire leads many adolescents to indulge in violating others' privacy to reach greater heights in popularity. The novel *Famous* expresses this lifestyle of adolescents.

Chapter I focuses on the origin and development of Criminology; Crime fiction, its role and development in American literature. It traces the origin and development of young adult literature till the age of Todd Strasser. The life and works of Todd Strasser are dealt in detail. This chapter attempts to give an insight into the review of literature; the novels chosen for the research and the framework of the thesis along with methodology.

Chapter II, "The Scars of Childhood Violence" – traces the adverse conditions undergone by adolescents in their early childhood. The ill-treatment from parents results as a scar in the child's mind. This acts as the first stage of risk factor which opens up the pathway to criminality. It is traced through the study Adverse Childhood Experience.

Through the application of the study, the struggles undergone by a child is addressed with reference to the select novels of Todd Strasser.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is the first stage and usually it acts as a triggering factor for a child to become a criminal in the future. ACE states that children who go through a hard childhood often find solace in rebelling and indulging in criminal activities in their teenage years. The ten factors that play a crucial role in developing adverse conditions in children are emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, death of a parent, domestic violence, household member addicted to alcohol or drugs, family member with mental illness and incarceration of family members.

In the novel *Angel Dust Blues* the ACE conditions Alex faced were emotional abuse, emotional neglect and physical neglect by his parents that turned him rebellious. In *Give a Boy a Gun* the ACE Gary underwent were emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, domestic violence, family member experiencing mental illness and loss of a parent. As a corollary, he became antisocial and quiet. The ACE undergone by Maybe in *Can't Get There from Here* were emotional abuse, physical abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, domestic violence, loss of a parent and household members consuming alcohol, this made her numb to emotions and lose trust in adults. In the novel, *If I Grow Up* the ACE DeShawn faced were emotional abuse, the loss of both parents, emotional neglect and physical neglect which made him detest violence. In the novel, *Famous* the Adverse Childhood Experience Jamie faced emotional abuse, loss of a parent, living with a physically and mentally challenged brother, emotional neglect and parents' divorce which caused her to leave home. So she began to be rebellious. Children depend on their parents for care and affection until they attain a certain age. When these are denied, the characters begin to rely on peers' affection to fill in the void left by their parents.

Chapter III “Delinquent Influences among Adolescents” – identifies the delinquent factors which influence adolescents towards crime. The second stage of risk factor traces the beginning of the transition process towards criminality. The influential factors are identified with the application of Differential Association Theory. The protagonists in the select novels of Todd Strasser were influenced by many delinquent factors which act as a stepping stone towards criminal behaviour.

The influential factors are mapped with the application of the nine principles of Differential Association Theory. The nine principles are: criminal behaviour is learned; criminal behaviour is learned through interactions with others; most learning processes of criminal behaviour happens among intimate personal groups and relationships, especially among peers; the process of learning criminal behaviour include learning about the techniques and the motives as well; the direction of motives and driving factor towards criminal behaviour is learned through the interpretation of legal codes in one’s geographical area as favourable or unfavourable; if the number of favourable interpretations that support violating the law outweigh the unfavourable interpretations then an individual will choose to become a criminal; all differential associations can vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity; the process of learning criminal behaviour takes place through interactions with criminals; and criminal behaviour is an expression of generalized needs and values. Through these nine principles the learning process of criminal behaviour in the characters are identified.

In the novel *Angel Dust Blues*, Alex’s friendship with a drug dealer made him familiarize with the usage and selling of drugs. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, through his friendship with Brendan and exposure to violent media content Gary learns violent behaviour. The

friends of Maybe in *Can't Get There from Here* were doing illegal activities to survive which influenced her to consume alcohol at a young age. In *If I Grow Up*, DeShawn's close company was a drug supplier who also taught him to sell drugs. In the novel *Famous*, Jamie was encouraged to attain popularity by means of theft from her close friend Avy. When they face a tough situation, they implement the criminal behaviour which they have learnt.

Chapter IV "Circumstantial Transgression by Adolescents" – recognises the circumstantial factors which leads adolescents to commit a crime. The transition process becomes complete with the characters committing a crime. This is the third and final stage of the risk factor where the circumstantial factors prompt criminal behaviour. The criminal behaviour is traced using Situational Action Theory. In the select novels of Todd Strasser, the components of Situational Action Theory - motivation, temptation, provocation, perception and choice are traced among adolescents.

In *Angel Dust Blues*, Alex wanted to gain attention from others so he chose to be a drug dealer to gain friendship and attention among his peers. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Gary was tired of being the victim of bullying so he wanted to avenge his bullies. He built a bomb, took hostages and shot students as a means of revenge. In *If I Grow Up*, DeShawn and his family lived in poverty. When they did not have any food, he chose to join the drug dealing gang to provide food for his family. In *Can't Get There from Here*, Maybe was starving in the cold weather and had no food to eat so she chose to consume alcohol. In the novel *Famous*, Jamie was obsessed with popularity so she stole photos of a famous star by violating her privacy. Thus each character became criminals according to their circumstances. Later there is a transformation in the characters' attitude.

Chapter V “Transformation through Witness” – explores the transformation of adolescent criminals through protective factors. It focuses on the positive change experienced by the protagonist by overcoming criminal behaviour. This change acts as a turning point in the protagonists’ life. The transformation through protective factors in adolescent criminals is traced through the application of the Enlightened Witness. The right influential people who can provide proper guidance to help the teenagers to overcome their criminal behaviour are identified in the select novels of Todd Strasser.

The guidance of enlightened witness is nothing but social parenting, which means during the absence of a parent, a representative from the society advises the adolescent if he does something wrong. In the traditional social setup, when a person finds an adolescent smoking in a public place without the knowledge of his parents, any parental figure from the society would condemn his act. This kind of admonishment from social parenting slowly got evaded from the practice due to modernization and infringement of the personal rights which every child claims.

In the novel *Angel Dust Blues*, with the help of Ellen, James and Sekamp, Alex was able to quit his drug business. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Gary with the help of his mother and his friend Allison, was able to realise his mistake. In the novel *Can’t Get There from Here*, Maybe had Officer Ryan, Anthony, Laura and Officer Charles who helped her to overcome her alcoholic habit. In *If I Grow Up*, the enlightened witnesses in DeShawn’s life are Officer Patterson and Mr. Brand. These witnesses made DeShawn to realise his mistake and they helped him quit gang life to live an honest drug free life. In the novel *Famous*, Jamie through the advice of her parents and friends regretted stealing and they helped her overcome her obsession. All the characters had a change of heart at the end of

the novel. Even after committing an act of crime, they realised the importance of enlightened witnesses in their lives and this opened doors for them to lead a life that is free from crime.

The protagonists in the novels undergo ACE in their childhood which turns them into criminals but through the protective factors they were able to realize their mistakes. The intensity of the crime decreases with the increase of protective factors. When Alex had undergone three factors of ACE during his childhood, he was able to overcome the trauma through the three protective factors who helped him during his adolescence. Gary experienced six ACE and he had two protective factors. Even though he realized his mistake, since he did not have enough protective factors he committed suicide. Maybe experienced seven factors of ACE and through four protective people she was able to overcome her traumatic experiences and live a new life. DeShawn had undergone four factors of ACE and had two protective factors; even though he became a murderer, he was able to resent for his actions. Jamie had undergone five factors of ACE and she had two protective factors, but after stealing a person's private picture, she did not misuse it rather she realized her mistake and turned a new leaf.

The juxtaposing characters in the novels James, Ryan, Tears, Lightbulb and Nazim, though placed in a similar traumatic situation of the central characters; they did not commit crime, as they had positive protective factors such as reading books, engaging in sports, possessing strong values, spending time with pet animals and playing musical instruments respectively. Thus if the protagonists of the selected novels were also exposed to such positive hobbies, it is likely that they would have been able to avoid going down the path of delinquency. Positive hobby is practising any sport or game, reading books,

learning new art or skill, indulging in creative writing, spending time with pet animals, birds or fish, playing musical instruments.

Adolescent crime, a socio-psychological issue which arises from the combination of risk factors such as childhood scars, delinquent peers and environmental factors, can be avoided or an adolescent can regret through the protective factors like social parenting and indulging in any positive hobby.

A theme is a central idea with a deeper message in a story. The common themes present in the novels, *Angel Dust Blues*, *Give a Boy a Gun*, *Can't Get There from Here*, *If I Grow Up* and *Famous* are discrimination, poverty, drugs, alienation, bullying, coming of age, distorted childhood and unsafe environment.

Discrimination is an unfair or biased treatment, a person or a group receives because of their gender, age or race. It is vividly portrayed by Strasser in *Angel Dust Blues*, *Can't Get There from Here* and *If I Grow Up*. Discrimination is a major theme in these novels. In *If I Grow Up*, the main reason behind the poor social and economic condition of DeShawn and his Project people is due to the discrimination they face because of the colour of their skin. They are called black Americans and are made to live in the Projects with broken houses. They do not have any proper jobs for sustenance so they lost hope in the government and their failed promises. Throughout the novel they continue to live a miserable life as discriminated people.

In *Can't Get There from Here*, discrimination is portrayed in two places. Maybe is ill-treated due to a rare skin condition she has, which is detested by many people. Secondly, Maybe and Rainbow are mistreated because they are homeless. They are made to clean

the bathroom of the public library for taking bath in the library bathroom. Thus Maybe is discriminated because of her skin condition and her poor lifestyle.

In the novel *Angel Dust Blues*, discrimination is depicted through the comparison between the lifestyle of both Michael and Alex from their attires to their residences. The locality in which Michael and Alex's houses are located show their social differences. Alex lives in a residential place with a huge lawn and owns a car while Michael lives in the outskirts of the city in a poorly built small house. Alex's parents are rich and they own a private yacht while Michael's handicapped mother has to work hard to provide food for the family every day. Michael wore cheap clothes while Alex wore branded clothes. In the novel Michael was ill treated by many for his clothes and residing place. The author contrasts the social status differences of Michael and Alex through the things they possess to show the discrimination that was prevailing in America.

Poverty represents a person's struggle for basic needs such as food, clothing or shelter. It is one of the core themes present in *Angel Dust Blues*, *Can't Get There from Here* and *If I Grow Up*. In *Can't Get There from Here*, throughout the novel Maybe is portrayed with hunger and suffering due to homelessness. Only in a few situations she is well fed and clothed comfortably. The other characters also experience hunger and homelessness. Maybe's poor living condition is projected through the thin clothes she wears for winter. Maybe picks up a jacket from the church entrance, where they leave jackets for homeless people, which comforts her for some time till the temperature drops. Some characters die of cold, while some end up in hospitals due to hunger and cold. Poverty has consumed many of the characters. In the novel *Angel Dust Blues*, Michael

self-pitied his poor social status and it made him choose illegal methods to break free from poverty but in return it turned him into a drug addict.

Poverty has handicapped many slum youths in America making them feel helpless in the face of hunger. Low income areas along with the presence of illegal drug distribution networks and gang activities could provide high exposure to violence. Poverty has made many youngsters to adopt illegal measures because of the desperate need to stay alive. The common illegal practices that are carried out are robbery, vehicle theft, shoplifting, drug trafficking and homicide. Such practices lead to an unhealthy physical and mental development in teenagers living below the poverty line. Similarly, in the novel *If I Grow Up*, DeShawn's family is in poverty. They do not have anything to feed themselves. So the dire need of money has made him join a drug distribution gang. There he has sold drugs to earn money and to provide food for his family.

Narcotic drugs are illegal drugs which are used to numb pain, dulls the senses and gives a profound sleep. These drugs are opium, morphine, heroine and its derivatives. The characters in the novels, *Angel Dust Blues*, *Can't Get There from Here*, *If I Grow Up* and *Famous* consume these drugs. Consumption of illegal drugs has become a common practice among many adolescents. Most of these adolescents get their supply of drugs from school students in the school premises. In the novel *Angel Dust Blues*, Michael is a drug addict and sells drugs to school students. This has become his occupation. Alex is drawn into this business and starts distributing drugs to his schoolmates. Due to over dosage of drugs Michael became paranoid, anti-social, anxious and finally ends up in coma. This became a wakeup call for Alex and he quit selling drugs. Strasser through Michael conveys a social message about the negative effects of narcotic drugs.

Strasser also brings reference to drugs in the novel *Famous*, Avy sells and consumes illegal drugs and his fingernails have turned dark from smoking nicotine. In the novel *Can't Get There from Here*, Maybe's friend, Maggot sells and consumes drugs such as cocaine and marijuana. DeShawn and his friend in *If I Grow Up* became drug dealers. In the story the consumption of drugs and selling them becomes a choice of lifestyle for the survival of the teenagers in the Projects. Strasser through some characters manifests the prevalent problem of drug usage among teenagers in America.

Alienation is the need to isolate themselves from the society and social conventions as people feel that they do not have the sense of belongingness. It is a common phenomenon witnessed among teenagers these days. Alienation has made many adolescents undergo depression and anxiety. It can also result in paranoia. In Strasser's novels many characters experienced alienation at school or in social gatherings. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, the sense of fear and alienation had led Gary and Brendan to come to terms with the darker side of themselves and finally reach a breaking point where they stopped caring about anyone. Throughout the novel, "Strasser explores common social problems facing adolescents, including the difficulties of moving to a new school, the sense of inferiority if one does not play sports, and a lack of understanding and empathy often found among students – all of which can create a sense of fear and alienation" (Meyer).

In *Can't Get There from Here*, Maybe felt alienated from her mother which made her forge friendship with the teenagers on the street. Thus the insecurities about the future and alienation made Maybe consider the asphalt tribe members as her family. In the novel *If I Grow up*, DeShawn felt alienated from his family because of the struggles they underwent due to poverty and the burden of responsibility he had to shoulder at a very young age.

He could not share or discuss his situation with anyone. So he had no choice than to keep his emotions intact. In *Famous*, Jamie's brother was physically and mentally ill so her mother had to take care of him every day. When Jamie achieved something in her profession her mother showed no interest, because she was always preoccupied with her brother's illness. There were times when Jamie would be out of town and when she returns home, her mother would be disturbed by her brother that she completely forgot that Jamie had returned from her trip. This made Jamie feel isolated from her own family.

In *Angel Dust Blues*, Alex felt alienated even in his own house. He described the house to be enormous with only one servant present in the whole place. Since his parents visited him once a week, he was left alone the other days. Thus Alex felt lonely in his own place and the feeling of alienation was due to the absence of his parents. The sense of alienation undergone by these characters made them yearn for the love and affection of their parents. Alienation was not a choice rather it was enforced upon them by their families. As a result they become friends with criminals who might turn their lonely life interesting.

In recent times many countries have witnessed bullying as another form of abuse among all age groups. Bullying is a form of abuse when someone or a group uses forceful or hurtful methods to dominate or intimate another person. Bullying is a repeated and deliberate harming or humiliating done to a person over a period of time. It can be in the form of teasing or threat mainly due to imbalance of power among peers. This is common among teenagers in schools. It is reported that America has the highest rate of bullying cases filed among developed countries. In literature the first book to emerge on bullying was Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun*. For ages bullying has been a routine happening in many American schools and many school managements fail to take serious measures to curb

the situation, so many students become the victims of bullying. In Gary and Brendan bullying led to isolation, low self-confidence, suicidal thoughts, anti-social behaviour and feeling depressed. As a result Gary and Brendan were made to accept bullying as a part of their school life.

On the other hand many schools in America have imposed zero tolerance to bullying so when they find students bullying other students they suspend or expel them from school. They also have anti-bullying committee and counseling cells to help the victims and punish the perpetrator. If the school manages discipline among students with high protection and morale syllabus bullying can be curbed. The major reason for bullying is lack of empathy. Empathy is a choice that is failed to be practiced by many students. Many factors can cause the lack of empathy in teenagers; but one common factor in recent times is exposure to too much violent content in the media. Gary and Brendan failed to practice empathy so they staged a school shooting.

Coming of age is an important state of development that traces the transition of a child to adulthood. It also emphasizes on the loss of innocence and stepping into adulthood. Coming of Age is seen in the protagonist of all the select novels of Strasser. It is distinctly seen in the character Maybe of *Can't Get There from Here*, when she realises that she cannot live on the street but only die there. This realisation is an awakening which makes her to choose a different path for her survival and her tribe members' survival. Maybe believed that she could survive on the street but later she came to an understanding that she could not. This is a sign of maturity that Maybe developed in the novel.

Alex, in *Angel Dust Blues* came to a realization that he did not need people's attention to live a successful life rather he should be happy with the supportive people he

had around him. So he stopped trying to please his classmates through the drug business and began living as a college student. This final realization made Alex have a matured outlook at the world.

DeShawn, in *If I Grow Up* was able to show early signs of maturity at the age of fifteen when he realised that his family was starving. So he wanted to earn money to support his family. As an adolescent, providing for his family became his first priority and he was ready to go to any extent for it. Jamie, in *Famous* was in a dilemma to choose right from wrong but her father made her understand the right path which she is supposed to take. So as a result she concluded that family was more important than riches. All these characters mature through the novel and show a matured side of themselves towards the end of the novels.

Distorted childhood means the misuse or abuse of children in their early years which could create a disturbing image for the children in future. This was one of the root causes for the main characters in the novels to involve themselves in illegal activities. In *Can't Get There from Here* many characters feared their parents and ran away from their homes or from foster homes. Even though life on the streets was tough they were ready to suffer rather than to go to their parents. Rainbow confessed that her mother sold her twice to buy drugs. Tears left her home because of the sexual abuse she received from her mother's boyfriend. 2moro was sexually abused in her foster homes because of which she contracted AIDS. Finally, when Maybe was given a choice to go back home or to the Youth Housing Project, she feared going back to her mother's place and decided to live in the Youth Housing Project. The fear of going back home was more than the adversity they underwent on the street, which was the main reason these characters ran away from

home. Thus careless and irresponsible parents made these kids undergo a distorted childhood.

In *Angel Dust Blues*, Alex had a tough time growing up without the guidance of his parents which later turned him into a drug dealer. DeShawn, in the novel *If I Grow Up*, grew up without any parent which made him easily get exposed to drugs and alcohol at a very young age. Jamie, in *Famous*, longed for her mother's attention but when she failed to receive it she planned to shift to a different city and start a new life. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Gary had a hard time accepting his father's absence in his life. This made him more and more depressed and finally made him unempathetic. Thus the teenagers in these novels had a distorted childhood because of their families, which was one of the major triggering factors for them to turn into a criminal in the future.

The environment in which a child grows also plays a significant role in his or her life and decisions. DeShawn at a young age heard gunshots every day; the walls of his house had bullet holes; witnessed many deaths and had a shrunken stomach because of hunger. All these made him accept the gang life as normal means for survival. Thus such teenagers are handicapped to attain a social and economic status because of the unsafe environment. Thus they are prone to become criminals.

Gray and Brendan in *Give a Boy a Gun*, felt unsafe in their school environment because of bullying. They feared to walk the hallways because they could end up meeting a bully there. Brendan many times tried to stand up against them but as a reward he was bullied even more. School environment is a place a child should feel safe, but it was not for Gary and Brendan and many other kids in the novel. Thus these are the common themes that are seen in the select novels of Todd Strasser.

Strasser's writings are linear and simple. Since most of his works are written for the middle school students, he uses lucid narrative. His works fall under two categories: comical and serious. His comical works entertain and enrich its readers, while his serious works are based on real life problems. The novels taken for research are from his serious works, they are: *Angel Dust Blues*, *Give a Boy a Gun*, *Can't Get There from Here*, *If I Grow Up* and *Famous*. Strasser had written each novel in a different manner incorporating different narrative styles and techniques.

In his first novel *Angel Dust Blues*, Strasser uses third person narrative. It is a form of narrative in which the narrator is not present in the novel rather narrates the story by addressing the characters through their names. It is the author himself who voices and judges the characters throughout the narrative.

In *Give a Boy a Gun* Strasser uses different narratives: multiperspectivity narration, dark tone, foreshadowing technique and symbols. Strasser's narrative was straightforward and simple in style. In the novel he uses multiperspectivity narration, which is a form of narrative told from many points of view of a single incident. There are twenty two viewpoints of one story- some are sympathetic, others are hostile. The novel covers a unique perspective by looking back and narrating the story from past forward by combining each perspective to give a picture of the overall story. The reader gets a vantage point at the story where he can experience the point of view of all the characters involved. Also the story is in epistolary form with conversational language used in late 1990's and early 2000. Many readers have appreciated Strasser for his strong and descriptive narration. He blends fact and fiction with reference to real life incidents and news articles in between the novel.

The novel *Can't Get There from Here* is narrated from the first person perspective of Maybe, the protagonist. Maybe and her tribe live in the cold streets of New York fighting hunger. Some characters are unable to survive the tough living conditions and die either of sickness or by committing suicide. Whenever a character dies the author uses the technique of publishing a newspaper article which explains the background of the characters through explaining their diseases and their criminal records. Through this technique the author informs the readers the life of the characters and what led them to live on the street.

In the novel *If I Grow Up*, Strasser narrates the story through first person narrative of DeShawn. He begins narrating his story from the age of twelve till he is twenty eight years old. He uses the common African American dialect spoken in the inner cities of Chicago. The author captures the expression and the emotions through their tone.

The novel *Famous* is narrated from the first person narrative by four narrators. The author uses multiple narratives with different time lines and different voices. Jamie's narration is considered as primary narrative, which is divided into five parts: through email, past incidents, through newspaper clippings, futuristic narrative and finally through her direct narration. The other narrations in the novel are considered as secondary narrations, they are narrated by: Avy, Detective Carlos Ramos and letters by Richard. Jamie's emails and Richard's letters are in different fonts to differentiate them from normal conversation.

The narrative techniques used by Strasser in the select novels are hyperbole, foreshadowing and metaphor. He also uses different settings and symbols in the novels to support his stories.

In his first novel *Angel Dust Blues*, Strasser through his narration was able to capture the social setting and the teenage struggles of the age with relatable characters of the modern day. Hyperbole is a figure of speech used to exaggerate a situation or an emotion. The author uses hyperbole in some place to give more emphasis on the content. Alex was compared to an inanimate object - car, to show the interest his parents have on him, “Like a car that runs for years without needing servicing, they wanted a low maintenance offspring” (Strasser, *ADB* 19).

In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Strasser, the author uses foreshadowing technique, which is a literary device used to give inkling about the incidents which are to occur in the future. One example is a part of Gary’s suicide letter expressing that he would be dead when they read this letter, he says: “By the time you read this, I’ll be gone” (Strasser, *GBG* 133). The author also uses metaphors in the story. Metaphor is a figure of speech used to describe an object, a person or an action in a non-literal sense to describe an idea better or to make a comparison. In the novel there is an expression by one of the narrators as, “Allison Findley could be an angel...” (Strasser, *GBG* 164). Alison was metaphorically compared to an angel to describe the good deed she has done.

In the novel, the author’s tone is often dark and anxious. The characters slowly unravel the problem. The novel is set in Middletown High School with a dark atmosphere. Through the character Denise, the author determines the environment as: “Returning to Middletown was like stepping into a thick fog of bewilderment, fury, agony and despair” (Strasser, *GBG* 9). The setting of the novel is intense and the students show a constant stress around the school environment.

In the novel *Can't Get There from Here*, the author uses fake names for the characters such as Maybe, 2moro, Rainbow, OG, Country Club, Maggot, Tears and Jewel. These names either reflect their characteristics or interests. They use these names to address themselves in order to forget their original names which are a reminder of their past sufferings. Thus they addressed each other with the new name and no one knew anyone's actual name.

Strasser brings a metaphorical reference to a baby squirrel and compares it to Maybe and Tears. While visiting a park Maybe and Tears come across a little squirrel which kept crying and climbing all the trees in search of its mother. Tears and Maybe are drawn towards this situation. Even after leaving the park, Tears and Maybe wonder if the squirrel has been reunited with its mother. The little squirrel is a representation of Maybe and Tears living without their mothers. They too are on the street lost and sad yearning for their mothers' love.

In the novel *If I Grow Up*, the novel's setting is dark and gloomy. It is because the buildings in the Project were broken down without proper maintenance and the people living there do not have a proper livelihood. The struggle every day to meet their both ends represents the dark and gloomy setting of the novel. The author begins each chapter by mentioning DeShawn's age and the plight undergone by the African Americans in the country. He points out the government's failed initiatives and the division between 'black and white' which was evident in schools and social settings. Additionally he gives statistical information on the rise in unemployed blacks, black single mothers, uneducated black school students and the rise of black men in jails.

The setting of the novel was gloomy and bleak. DeShawn also had mentioned the Projects to be gritty, filthy and foul smelled. The unpromising and hopeless environment in the Project sucked the joy out of the people living there. The author creates such a setting to highlight the wrecked and despicable lifestyle of the dealers, which also affects the life of the other people around them. DeShawn once mentioned while leaving his house, “Cold, dark air filled my lungs” (Strasser, *IIFG* 6). Air does not have a colour but the author gives a colour to indicate the darkness that is present in the mind of the character. Darkness symbolizes the negative elements such as corruption and immorality. Strasser uses it to symbolize the corrupt and immoral acts done on the Projects by drug dealers.

A common symbol in the novels, *Can't Get There from Here* and *If I Grow Up*, is a dog. A minor character in the novels raises these dogs from the street; both the dogs are always hungry and wild just like the characters who adopted them. The dogs are not present till the end of the novel because one dies and another one is lost. The dogs here act as a reflection of the character condition and situation – the poverty and hunger. The characters too do not have a proper family to guide them. So in a way they are also untamed and wild like the street dogs they adopted.

The thesis paves way for the future researchers to explore crime writings and to develop interest in this discipline. It also investigates the contemporary crime fiction form and analyses the flexibility of literature in other fields like criminology. Further study can be done on ‘Realism’ because Strasser has fictionalised many real life incidents in his works. ‘Young adult psychology’ can also be analysed because all the major characters of the selected novels are around the age of twelve to twenty who go through emotional upheaval which leads to understanding. ‘Search for identity’ could also be discussed because

throughout the novels each character searches for his or her identity in different things and finally they succeed in finding their place in the world. Further research can be done on 'criminogenesis', to trace the origin of a crime and 'criminality', to identify the criminal qualities present in the characters.

The readers of literature must understand the prevalence and seriousness of crimes in today's society. The research aims to identify the root cause that led the ordinary adolescents indulge in criminal activities and the positive changes that occur in the criminals minds in the end. Through Todd Strasser's select novels, the motive behind each crime is dealt in detail which is based on the risk and protective factors present in an adolescent's life. The research highlights the three stages of risk factors that lead a young adult to commit a crime and the protective factors that are present in their life.

The pathway to delinquency deals with early childhood victimization, association with delinquent peers and exposure to tough environments. Crime begins from childhood where adolescents experience troubled familial issues which make them rely on peers' influence during their adolescence. Later the influence became delinquent and made them choose crime as an immediate advancement in tough situations. Thus turning them into a criminal in the end. Finally, there is a realization through kind people who helped them transform their lives for the better. These people are the protective factors.

Human beings' role in the society is to show kindness and compassion so that the society will not become a prison for those who suffer. Thus the importance of protective factors in creating a positive behavioral change among adolescent criminals by making them aware of their delinquent risk behavioural association could lead them to re-evaluate their moral and ethical values.

Protective factors can reduce the effect of risk factors. Healthy school environment and supportive guardians are some of the protective factors present in day-to-day life. Even though some children are raised in high crime neighbourhoods with many risk factors they could grow to be successful adults with the help of affectionate parents or encouraging teachers. Consequently, such protective factors' effectiveness could eliminate the negative influences of risk factors or in some cases to protect from further serious crimes. The risk factors are traced through childhood scars, peer influence and circumstantial factors; and the protective factors are traced through enlightened witnesses in the select novels of Todd Strasser. Therefore, engaging in positive hobbies and social parenting can potentially steer delinquent children towards a positive life trajectory.